XI-XII

THE CITY OF WASHINGTON

Its Origin and Administration

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HERBERT B. ADAMS, Editor

History is past Politics and Politics present History — *Freeman*

THIRD SERIES

XI-XII

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BY JOHN ADDISON PORTER

"The art of governing cities is the chief excellence of man."—*Plutarch*

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THE CITY OF WASHINGTON;

Its Origin and Administration.[1]

During the perils and uncertainties of the Revolution, Congress was frequently obliged to adjourn from place to place. One place of meeting (Philadelphia) seemed feasible under the established Confederation. But Congress fled from Philadelphia to Princeton, New Jersey, in 1783, it might almost be said at point of bayonet, not of the enemy, but of their own unpaid troops, whose insolence the authorities of the Quaker City did little to suppress.

The prolonged and bitter contentions which immediately sprang up concerning the choice of a site, did not arise because

[1] A report on the progress of this study of the City of Washington was submitted, for criticism, to the Historical Seminary of the Johns Hopkins University, May 29, 1885. Extracts from it were also read before the American Historical Society at its meeting in Saratoga, September 9, 1885. Inasmuch as this paper is intended to be suggestive rather than exhaustive, the author has preferred not to burden his pages with long quotations and detailed references. From no one of the numerous volumes on Washington has he derived such special knowledge of the subjects herein treated as to justify particular mention. In fact material for the study was chiefly obtained from local newspapers, the files of which at the capitol are, happily, very complete and of unusual interest to the student of American History and Politics. For friendly assistance in this research, cordial acknowledgments are made to Frazier Davenport Head, Ph. B., of Washington. The author also takes pleasure in mentioning the valuable suggestions received from the Editor of this Series, who first called attention, indeed, to the interest and practical bearing of the subject treated in the following pages.
—J. A. P.

the importance of the future Capital was accurately forecasted by the citizens of the new states. Many intelligent men, indeed, were wholly sceptical of the chances for success of the administration. A few optimists doubtless painted the future of the Capital in glowing colors. But in the creation of it, as in other matters of public polity at that time, "provincialism, prejudice, and avarice," played important though disagreeable parts.

In those days citizens of the United States "counted their treasury-notes by the bushel." It was thought that the presence of the Capital would promote the financial prosperity of the region in which it was situated. Hence, where motives of pride or ambition failed to incline the people to harbor the government, the eagerness of the people to reimburse themselves for the losses and poverty occasioned by the late war tended to the same result.

The list of a score or more places which were "named for the honor" (some of them in the merely complimentary sense in which "favorite sons" of states are now-a-days named for the Presidency) is chiefly remarkable for the number of insignificant names which it contains. New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore were indeed there. But there were others then unknown to fame and which it is now not easy to find upon the map. Whatever errors Congress committed, the patriotic reader may be profoundly thankful for some things which they did *not* do in the location of a Capital.

During the seven years when the subject was under serious discussion, *i. e.*, between 1783 and 1790, the states of New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Maryland, and New Jersey, were actively represented in the competition. Memorials were received from the legislatures of New Jersey and Pennsylvania favoring some position on the banks of the Delaware. Afterwards the Susquehanna was hotly urged in place of the Potomac, named at an early date by the Virginians. Trenton and Annapolis, which had been tried and liked by the Continental Congress, were formally offered, and as quickly refused.

Maryland, in 1778, and Virginia, in 1779, generously agreed, through their representatives in Congress, to cede *any* district ten miles square within their borders which Congress might desire to occupy as the permanent seat of government. Virginia asked the co-operation of Maryland in inducing Congress to accept the grant and pledged herself to furnish a sum not to exceed $120,000 for the public buildings, provided Maryland would raise at least two-fifths of that amount. Through the early debates of Congress on this subject, there was an evident concurrence that the state or city which received the Capital should do *something* to promote its prosperity. Thus, Monroe moved that Maryland and Virginia should pay for the first government buildings, if Georgetown was chosen; Pennsylvania and Maryland were to guarantee the clear navigation of the Susquehanna, in case the latter region should be preferred; Delaware and Maryland were, likewise, to open a water communication between the Chesapeake and the Delaware. New York and Philadelphia offered their public buildings for the accommodation of the government, and Baltimore started a subscription for new ones, payable if the government came there.

The special reason for the offer of the states of Virginia and Maryland to cede some of their land to Congress, was that in the Constitutional Convention of 1787, it had been moved by Madison, without opposition, that Congress should have *exclusive* jurisdiction over the proposed district (not exceeding ten miles square) to be used as the permanent seat of the federal government. The clause to this effect, slightly modified in form, is now a part of the Constitution of the United States. The drift of opinion was plainly against the selection of a State Capital or a large city, for fear that local laws or customs might tend to interfere with some of the proper prerogatives of Congress, in administering the affairs of the Capital. A central position, accessibility, and agreeable surroundings, were, besides the requisite *freedom*, frequently and cheerfully admitted to be the conditions of a

satisfactory choice, though any proposal to reduce the theory to a practical test occasioned the liveliest and most bitter debate.

The attractive country near Philadelphia seemed to fulfil these requirements. On the 27th of September, 1789, a motion to place the Capital in a district ten miles square, at Germantown, Pennsylvania, passed both Houses of Congress, and was finally lost only because the Senate adjourned before having time to consider a slight amendment which the Representatives had offered to the original bill. At the busy session in the Spring of the following year, at New York, the complexion and temper of both Houses were considerably altered, and the choice, which the Pennsylvanians had reason to expect, was lost to them forever.

In the final choice of the apparently least eligible (Potomac) site, Hamilton and Jefferson seem to have had a considerable share. By a neat stroke of "practical politics," they exchanged enough votes between the supporters of the Funding Bill (for the assumption of the state war debts by the government) and the advocates of the Potomac site, to insure the passage of each bill. The Funding Bill had been cordially welcomed by the creditor states of the North and as bitterly opposed by the debtor states of the South. Being the keynote of Hamilton's financial system, the adoption of this measure was a *sine qua non* with him. The vote of Pennsylvania was indispensable to the passage of the bill. But the Pennsylvanians were touchy and expectant, because Germantown had so narrowly escaped being chosen Capital, and was still among the possibilities. A very delicate stroke was required to win the day; but there were master hands to make it. The Pennsylvanians were mollified by the insertion of a clause in the Senate bill of May 2, 1790, making Philadelphia the Capital till 1800.

The truce was struck and the bargain completed over fine punch and Madeira. Jefferson gave Hamilton a dinner-party to bring together their satellites. Their scheme was successful.

It is to be noticed, however, that the State of North Carolina came into the Union just in time to cast her five votes for the Potomac site. Without these votes the efforts of Hamilton and Jefferson would very likely have proved unsuccessful in mustering the small majority (32 to 29 in the House and 14 to 12 in the Senate) by which the bill was finally made a law. It was practically a vote of the "Solid South" vs. the Middle and New England states. If the latter had combined, they could easily have won the victory. The price might have been too dear. A leading New England statesman (Fisher Ames) had declared that animosities growing out of the question might split the Union. If yielding was to be done, it was not for the South. A weighty argument, indeed, had been that Virginia with great difficulty had ratified the Constitution, and that not to recognize its "claim," would be rank injustice.

The decision of Congress, while unpopular for a while, was soon regarded with indifference. The disappointed members loudly declared that they would rather not attend the sessions than go so far. Lampooners described the spot on the Potomac as a howling, malarious wilderness. But as it was yet a paper city, the feelings of the inhabitants were not hurt. Meantime the gay and populous city of Philadelphia was temporary Capital of the United States.

The attempt to place the Capital had been marked by jealousies, disputes and delays. But the work of mapping out the city proceeded with energy and dispatch. In less than seven weeks after the thirteenth state ratified the Constitution, the Potomac site was adopted, and just six months from that date the exact point was named and the labor begun of transforming an isolated tract of farm land into a centre of legislation for half a continent.

The final Act, of July 16, 1790, accepting the grants of ten miles square from the states of Virginia and Maryland, for settling the seat of government, gave the President a quite extraordinary latitude in the choice of the site. He might

plant the city anywhere "between the Eastern Branch of the Potomac (Anacostia) and the Conogocheague," a stream which enters the Potomac at Williamsport, Maryland. This is a distance of about eighty miles. The trust, though most honorable, was not, perhaps, quite so spontaneous as it appeared. Congress was in fact tired of the disputes and delays of former Commissioners on this subject, who had been appointed to help decide on a site, but had not even entered on their duties. Washington himself was at the zenith of his popularity. So tried and true was his judgment, that any decision which he might arrive at, unhampered, would go far toward disarming hostile criticism. He was, moreover, a resident in the adjacent country, a fact which afterwards subjected him to some unjust criticisms, as having placed the Capital of the United States with an eye to enhancing the value of his private estates at Mt. Vernon.

In addition to his other qualifications he had, a few years before, explored critically, with the eye of a surveyor (which profession he had followed in his youth) the entire course of the Potomac, from mountains to tide water, in the interest of the Potomac and James River Land Improvement Companies. Great things were then expected of this effort to open up trade with the West, or the Kentucky region. But in order to facilitate the business, and to guard against possible errors on the part of one man, however able and disinterested, three Commissioners were nominated to serve under him in planning the city.

Washington acted with his invariable caution, care, and judgment in deciding such a momentous question. When encamped with Braddock's army on Observatory Hill, he had noted the beauty of the broad plateau on which the Capitol now stands. He had also commended in high terms the beautiful Monocacy County, Maryland. Later he inclined somewhat fondly to the imposing heights of Georgetown.

Travel and transportation, in those days, depended largely on water communications. In discussing the subject Congress

had ignored almost entirely a comparison of land routes. It is noticeable that the site which Washington selected, was the only one at his option with the double advantage of being at the junction of inland and tide navigation. In view of its facilities and situation, adjacent to some of the most populous and richest states, Washington thought the city was destined to become the "greatest commercial emporium" in the United States. Thus have the wonders of steam made sport of the soundest intellect.

Georgetown, Alexandria, (and Carrollsburgh, where the Arsenal now stands) were already more or less flourishing settlements, when the work of prospecting began. The hope which each cherished that the city would be nearer to itself than to its neighbors, did not add to their common fund of amicability. Washington followed his natural bent toward strict impartiality by not giving any local preference. The site which he chose was, roughly speaking, between the first two of these settlements. It was owned by a few farmers, of English descent, most of whom were prosperous. Their fields were planted in wheat, corn and tobacco. "The father of his country," like Romulus of old, paced off in person the metes and bounds of the city. At every step he was vexed by the importunities of anxious residents and grasping speculators, who sought to anticipate the public. On the 14th of January, 1791, he reported to Congress that he had fixed the confines of the District. The lines were run by the Commissioners, the corner-stone being laid, April 15, 1791, at Jones' Point, near Alexandria, in the presence of a concourse of spectators. The lines thus determined included a certain tract of land on the west side of the Potomac. This course was contemplated in the original Act and Congress accordingly (March 3, 1791) passed an amendment legalizing this slight excess of authority. More than half a century afterwards, this strip of land, which includes the city of Alexandria, was ceded back to the State of Virginia.

The principal owners of the site agreed, March 30, 1791, to convey to the government, out of their farms, all the land

which was needed for streets, avenues, and public reservations, free of cost. All the land in the city limits was placed in the hands of trustees. The owners agreed to sell all the land which was needed for public buildings and improvements, for £25 per acre. All the rest the government divided into building lots and apportioned between itself and the owners. The small lots were to be sold by the government, and out of their proceeds the large ones were to be paid for. This was an exceedingly good bargain for the government. It was lucky in having few owners to deal with and no costly buildings to demolish. In one of the large cities this might have proved a serious item. Not a penny was advanced for the land which thus came into possession of the government. It got seventeen of the choicest large plots in the city (such as the Capitol now stands on), or five hundred and forty-one acres, for thirty-six thousand dollars. The 10,136 building lots which were assigned to the government, ultimately proved to be worth eight hundred and fifty thousand dollars, though a considerable part of this sum was not accounted for by the Commissioners. Counting the public reservations and streets, the tract acquired by the government was six hundred acres in the heart of the city. The tract to-day is worth, at the lowest estimate more than fifty millions of dollars. Washington was a shrewd financier, but it is doubtful if he ever made so good a bargain as this.

The name of the city was given to it by the Commissioners, Messrs. Johnson and Carroll, of Maryland, and Stuart, of Virginia. They also decided to call the "Territory" Columbia. Major L'Enfant, the engineer selected by Jefferson to plot the city, was a native of France, had been a captain of engineers in the Revolutionary war, and was a personal friend of both Washington and Jefferson. He was talented but arrogant. Washington said he was as well qualified for the work as any man living, but that the knowledge of this fact magnified his self-esteem. L'Enfant finally quarrelled with the Commissioners, and was removed

by Washington to make room for another engineer, Andrew Ellicott, a self-educated Pennsylvania Quaker, who continued to plot the city on a liberal scale.

In planning the federal Capital of the United States, L'Enfant drew his inspiration from old-world models. Jefferson, too, had lately returned from France, bringing with him plans of various foreign capitals. The plan of Washington has been likened to that of ancient Babylon. It has also been termed "Philadelphia griddled across Versailles." Broad avenues diverging from central reservations, in the shape of circles, squares and oblongs, make, with the intersections of the parallel streets, various triangles and other irregular spaces, some of which are owned and used by individuals for building purposes, and others kept by the city for small parks. The beauty and uniqueness of the plan, affording space without waste, and symmetry without sameness, may now be seen at a glance and is too familiar for further comment. But at the time the city was laid out, the scheme was thought to be too grand and chimerical. L'Enfant, in fact, laid plans for a city of half a million inhabitants, when no American, excepting possibly Madison, had formed any adequate conception of what our growth as a nation would be. Many patriotic citizens, indeed, cherished the hope that the Capital would never be a city of any considerable size. They dreaded centralizing tendencies and monarchical pomp in office. They would have been content to have the Capital merely a temporary rendezvous for passing the laws, like an ancient *Königstuhl* on the Rhine or Neckar, a seat from which the President and Congress would adjourn as soon as their public business was transacted. That in the face of such serious obstacles Washington was the only city in the United States laid out according to a comprehensive and far-reaching plan, which, in the course of nearly a century of our marvelous growth and unequalled prosperity as a people, has needed scarcely any change, or addition, is a matter of genuine surprise as well as of hearty congratulation.

After the first influx of speculators—among whom none bought more largely or lost more heavily than Robert Morris, the "Superintendent of finance" and friend of the government during the dark days of 1781—the sale of real estate languished. Foreigners seemed to have more confidence than natives in the success of the experiment. Engraved plans of the city had been well distributed abroad; Congress passed a law allowing aliens to hold land in the city; and for a time lots brought absurdly high prices in London. But after 1794 the home trade ceased almost entirely. There were some legal difficulties in transferring real estate. One of the main reasons, however, why the city did not grow faster, was that Congress could not remove thither for a number of years.

Washington himself proposed to stimulate the sale of lots in the capital by establishing sale-agencies in the principal states and cities in the Union. The plan was finally abandoned with reluctance; another, and at that time a favorite, scheme for raising money, viz., by lottery, was subsequently adopted by the Commissioners. The failure to dispose of the government lots on advantageous terms was the more serious, as the plan had been to pay for the first public buildings by the sale of these lots.

One hundred and twenty thousand dollars was supplied by Virginia and seventy-two thousand dollars was furnished by Maryland. The sum voted by these States was necessary because Congress had failed to make the appropriation of one hundred thousand dollars to begin the government buildings, named in their first discussions on the subject. The State gifts were soon exhausted and Congress, in 1796, authorized a loan of three hundred thousand dollars, to be devoted to this purpose. But nobody was willing to supply the cash. European capitalists turned a deaf ear to the appeal to loan the money, as they had so often done before at critical junctures in American affairs. The anxious Washington was constrained once more to invoke the friendly aid of Mary-

land in behalf of the District,—its territorial offspring as well as its neighbor. The State good-naturedly loaned an additional one hundred thousand dollars, not without first obtaining the personal security of the Commissioners. The credit of the government was, indeed, at a low ebb.

Much uncertainty prevailed as to what the choicest section of the city would be. Morris was almost the only speculator who bought east of the Capitol. A few bought largely in the northwest section, now the most fashionable quarter of the city. Washington himself bought two lots near the Capitol, for which he paid about one thousand dollars. He discouraged the sale of large blocks of land to individuals, fearing that their speculations would retard the legitimate growth of the city. The Commissioners bore his advice in mind, but did not abide by the rule invariably. Several of the largest purchasers were unable to fulfil their contracts and contributed not a little to the embarrassment of the government. The prices paid for the ordinary lots averaged from fifty to seventy-five dollars per acre. Capitol Hill was expected to bring the highest figures, but the principal owner kept his terms so high that purchasers were driven in the opposite direction. The owner of the land along Pennsylvania Avenue wisely presented lots to all who would build on them and thus population and business centred there.

The evenness, height and area of the grand plateau which so nobly overlooks "Broad Potomac's azure tide," of course suggested the fitting site for the Capitol building. The Executive Mansion, or "President's Palace," as Washington styled it, was placed at a convenient distance, in what was then the country. The department buildings were scattered about the city for the avowed purpose of keeping them free from the influence of Congress, as well as for artistic effect and to afford safety from fire.

The Capitol was designed by an amateur,—Dr. William Thornton, a native of the West Indies and, like L'Enfant, a friend of Jefferson. Hallett, who claimed the honor of

drawing the original "elevation," studied under Nash, the most fashionable English house-builder of his time. "Washington liked Thornton's plan and that went far toward insuring its adoption," writes a contemporary authority. To Jefferson posterity is indebted for introducing the cotton-blossom, tobacco-leaf and other original and appropriate designs in the artistic decoration of the building.

The corner-stone of the Capitol was laid with Masonic honors, by Washington, September 18, 1793. A prize of five hundred dollars and a building-lot had been offered for the best design, and a similar offer was made in regard to the President's House. But at that time there was scarcely a professional architect of note in the United States. A liberal prize might have been offered to European architects, and even if none of their plans had been adopted *in toto*, yet the comparison of ideas would have been well worth the price. If a competent and permanent superintendent of construction could have been secured, even at a high salary, many costly blunders would have been avoided and the scandals of professional jealousies and divided responsibilities would not have discouraged Congress and retarded the progress of the work. But that was a day of small things. Men from the new and distant States were not yet in accord with each others' ideas. The government was only just beginning to be able to act with vigor. Money was high and credit was low. One of the most valuable arts of modern times,—the mobilization of capital and the employment of large forces of labor simultaneously,—was in its infancy. The appropriations for the Capitol were scanty to begin with and were made so irregularly that necessary work frequently suffered or ceased—an administrative barbarism which survives to the present day.

The cost of the old Capitol—between two and three millions—was quite large but not excessive. The new wings cost more than three times their original estimate, or between eight and nine millions. It is a cause for pride that during

the Civil war the work of enlarging and beautifying the majestic structure went calmly on. Day by day the great dome grew toward the vault of Heaven. And when the colossal statue of Freedom was placed in its proud position, it was greeted by the roar of artillery which had been summoned to Washington to save the Union.

The White House was, for some inexplicable reason, copied after an Irish nobleman's house at Dublin. The chief wonder is that it has served its purpose so long and so well. House, Senate and even Supreme Court, have long since found new and more commodious quarters. Yet notwithstanding the unrivalled growth of the nation, and lately of the city, and the multiplication of public and social duties requiring transaction at the White House, the building remains the same (except for interior decorations) as when our grandparents attended the levees of the early Presidents.

In the last year of the century, Congress moved bag and baggage to its future municipal home. What it found there did not excite any very great enthusiasm. The surface of the so-called city was covered with scrub oaks and the shrubbery which flourishes in marshy places, of which there were only too many near the Capitol. The largest avenue (Pennsylvania) was in reality a morass covered with alder bushes. Streets were an unknown luxury. The solitary sidewalk, between the Capitol and the Treasury, was improvised of chips hewn from the public buildings and the sharp fragments lacerated both the feet and the feelings of pedestrians. The Capitol, White House, Treasury, and War department buildings were in process of erection or just completed; but there were no other buildings of size or importance, not even hotels. The disgusted Members were obliged to lodge at Georgetown and to go thither by stage over very bad roads. The contrast was the more unhappy as many Members had grown attached to the comforts and refinements of Philadelphia, which at that time boasted fifty thousand inhabitants. In the end, however, this barrenness bore good

fruit. The very obvious defects before their eyes made all men, whatever their previous theories on the subject, more favorably inclined to render the city at least habitable, if not elegant. The plans which were forthwith adopted were ambitious enough to suit the most progressive—and included a grand equestrian statue of Washington; a column symbolizing history; a naval column, to commemorate the deeds of that department, which now survives in dreams rather than in reality. Details were cheap, on paper, and Congress indulged in them *ad libitum*. There were to be fifteen grand squares, assigned to as many States to improve as they saw fit. Five lofty fountains were to add beauty and health to the heart of the city. An avenue four hundred feet wide, a mile long, and bordered by a magnificent park, was to connect the Congressional gardens with the Presidential mansion. Tiber Creek, which circled the base of Capitol Hill, was to be made a water-fall, twenty feet in height by fifty feet in width, flowing from beneath the centre of the building, in three broad streams, emptying into the Grand Canal,—in those days an arm of the Potomac. And finally a magnificent national cathedral, for fasts, thanksgivings and memorial celebrations, was to shelter historical trophies and treasure the dust of the illustrious dead. All these fine ideas existed not merely in the teeming brain of some ignored enthusiast, but were specific parts of the accepted plan of work which Washington himself first submitted to Congress.

How to govern the feeble child of their creation, was a problem which puzzled Congress not a little. The District included portions of two states. Some members held that the laws of the ceding states should hold in their respective portions, *unless* contrary laws were passed for them by Congress. Other members were positive that the terms of the cession demanded government by the laws of Congress and by no other laws. The wording of the bill establishing the seat of government was, "That the operation of the laws of the state within such District shall not be affected by this

acceptance *until* the time fixed for the removal of the government thereto and *until* Congress shall otherwise by law provide." The legislature of Maryland in ratifying the cession of the District of Columbia, December 19, 1791, provided "That the jurisdiction of the laws of this State over the persons and property of individuals residing within the limits of the cession aforesaid shall not cease or determine *until* Congress shall by law provide for the government thereof, under their jurisdiction, in manner provided by the article of the constitution before recited." This was ambiguous. It *implied* that Congress would eventually remodel the legislation of the District, but left the date and the manner of its doing so wholly indefinite, even optional.

Upon one important point all factions were united, viz., that the executive head of the District should be appointed by the President of the United States, rather than elected by residents. As the appointee of the executive, the mayor, it was thought, could not fail to administer local affairs in harmony with the national administration.

Local representation in the government of the District was also a question which occasioned divisions and debates. A crude and awkward suggestion was that there should be but a single assembly, the representation from the Maryland shore exceeding the Virginia contingent in due numerical proportion as the territory and population were greater. A simpler proposition was to have an organization consisting of an upper and a lower house, with an equal representation from each side of the river. After mature deliberation, Congress decided, in 1802, to delegate the *active* administration of local affairs to the city government. By this act it by no means abandoned its final authority over the city and the District. What it did was merely to grant a reasonable scope and freedom to residents, in managing what concerned themselves more than the general government. Congress expressly reserved the right to recall any or all of these privileges, if at any time they were neglected or abused.

By the act of incorporation the city was divided into three wards, as previously it was by the Levy Court (tax assessors) of the county of Washington. The act provided for the election of two chambers, the first council being composed of seven and the second of five members, elected annually, on a general ticket. The smaller body was chosen by ballot from among the twelve. This roundabout way of assigning responsibilities was, it will be remembered, a favorite one with our forefathers as a supposed preventative against intrigue.

The first municipal election was held June 17, 1802, the mayor being appointed by the President, and in turn naming his subordinates. The Corporation was restrained by Congress from ordering tax sales for default of payment on unimproved lots. In 1804, a supplementary act was passed by Congress enlarging the power of the Corporation in some details; but the old Levy Court was prohibited from the further imposition of taxes except upon city property. This act reduced the city councils to nine members, and each branch was elected on a separate ballot, the confusion of the former method being demonstrated after even this short experience. Not long afterwards (1812) a second supplementary act was found advisable, by which the election of their mayor was conferred indirectly on the people, but his nominations of minor officials were subject to confirmation by the aldermen. This board was now organized so as to consist of two persons from each ward; the board of councilmen contained three members from each ward. The aldermen were elected for two years and the councilmen for one year. The expansion of the administrative powers of the Corporation was carried a step farther by the grant of authority from Congress to sell property for the non-payment of taxes. This act was progressive but not final; on the 15th of May, 1820, all previous enactments were superseded by the "Charter of the City of Washington," which remained in force, with but few and slight alterations, for over half a century. Under the "Charter of Washington," the Corporation exercised the powers over real

and personal property, the welfare of the citizens, and the improvement of the city, common to American municipalities of that date. In its constitution and make-up, it was probably not much in advance of the times.

The work of beautifying the city according to the original plan proceeded slowly, or rather it did not proceed. The only step actually taken for many years, was the planting, by Jefferson, of four rows of poplar trees on Pennsylvania avenue, in imitation of the famous *Unter den Linden* in Berlin. The contrast between what was promised and what was done, was so sharp as to invite ridicule. Georgetown was so muddy and Washington itself was so barren, that the former was epigrammatically described as "houses without streets" and the latter as "trees without houses." Strangers, after viewing the offices of state, were apt to inquire in perfect good faith, where the city was? Foreigners came and saw (or rather did *not* see) and jeered at what they were pleased to term the "presumption" of the young Republic in daring to palm off such a homely little town as a "capital."

The worst of it was that the soil of Washington seemed congenial to a tropical growth of unnecessary blunders and scandals. Oliver Wolcott, ex-Secretary of the Treasury, wrote, in 1800, that *five times* the necessary amount had been expended upon the improvements, without producing a satisfactory result. In 1803 a memorial was presented to Congress by the citizens, reciting that the funds provided for the present needs of the city had been shamefully and wantonly wasted. A local pamphleteer describes the affairs of the District at this date as "tottering on the verge of destruction." The people cried out that "their hands were tied;" that they were "slaves in a nation of freemen." They were disgusted at the apathy of Congress and complained bitterly at their absence of representation in that body. A hue and cry broke out to move the capital, at once, to a new site. Northern members at first, almost without exception, favored the

movement; they still felt a lively hankering for the flesh-pots of Philadelphia. After the loot of the town by the British, in 1814, the plea was entered with renewed vigor and plausibility. At that date, there were not more than seven hundred and fifty assessable persons in the District of Columbia, whose combined property was worth under two millions of dollars. Yet it had been prophesied by the sanguine, that the city would reach upwards of one hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants ere this! Patriotism finally carried the day; to be burned out by the enemy would be ignominious; and besides, capital and population had been drawn to Washington on the express understanding that Congress would remain there always.

The decision had, for a time, a beneficial effect on the fortunes of Washington; property rose in value; Georgetown ceased to be preferred as a place of residence; a glimmer of hope flickered amid the prevailing gloom, that the city would at last prove worthy of its name and its situation. But the old ghost of removal, Banquo-like, would not down! In 1846, on the retrocession of Alexandria (for alleged neglect by Congress), and still again, a quarter of a century later, on the opening up of the great West by the Pacific railroad, the scheme was still active and well supported, for removing the capital nearer to the geographical centre of the continent.

The uncertain state of the laws, as they had been left by Congress, had not only retarded the growth of the city, but led to gross abuses of justice. Even after the "Charter of Washington" was granted, the parts of the District on opposite sides of the river continued to be subject to the laws of the States to which they originally belonged. Meantime many of these laws had been abolished by the States because of their severity. For instance, the barbarisms of death for arson or petty larceny,—penalties originally in vogue in some of the States (including Maryland and Virginia),—had rapidly become obsolete. In this state of affairs many common offences were, in the District of

Columbia, allowed to go entirely unpunished, rather than to violate public opinion by fulfilling the letter of the law. Gambling and riots continued unsuppressed, for lack of police. A judicial system (including a circuit, and a criminal court) had been established in the District at an early date; but the intervals between the sessions of the higher courts were long, and the justices were limited in their authority and hampered in the exercise of such functions as were assigned to them. So litigious a spirit was thus fostered, that in 1821 no less than twelve hundred law suits between citizens of the District were waiting trial. Up to the middle of the century there was practically no insolvent law, except in regard to Corporation fines; and the usury law dated back to the reign of Queen Anne. In 1855 and 1871 commissioners were appointed by authority to simplify and codify the laws of the District of Columbia; though bringing intelligence and perseverence to the task, they left considerable reforms still to be desired, and their work was never adopted by Congress.

The most staggering burden was that the local government was never out of debt from the first to the last day of its existence; but as the years rolled on, its liabilities increased both in quality and quantity. It was, withal, a mean-spirited corporation; and is said to have been so grasping that it licensed slave-traders for a paltry sum. Whether with justice or not, remains to be seen, the old corporation was *obliged* to do considerable work on the streets. Except in this particular, however, it did next to nothing to improve the city. As late as 1837 the paving extended between the Government buildings only and was composed of primitive materials. A City Hall was not built for nearly twenty-five years and was then a shabby affair. The jail was an offensive disgrace. Long after the city was well-grown, the salary of the mayor continued at $500 per annum. Lethargy, parsimony and hopelessness, in short, characterized the old local government. Nor did the example of the general

government become more inspiriting, as Congress grew more accustomed, or indifferent, to its surroundings and devoted a more and more overwhelming portion of its time and attention to other subjects. Public scandals concerning what little was actually done for the city, did not cease with the early Commissioners. Wolcott's charges of misuse of the public monies became sadly familiar from a repetition of similar instances. One of the first official acts of the conscientious President Harrison was to appoint a committee to investigate this noisome subject.

Aroused, at last, by the existing unsightliness, Congress, in 1851, appointed a competent landscape-gardener to put in order the Presidential grounds and the Mall. But the man died within a few months of his appointment. And so the project was laid by again, for nearly a quarter of a century. Apparently, as if with the intention of lengthening the score of its delinquencies, several of the most glaring errors in the appearance of the city were committed in arrogance and ignorance by the highest officers of the government. Thus the unpardonable blunder of placing the Treasury so as to cut off all view of the Capitol from the White House, was a decree of Jackson.

As the city increased in population, the presence, in its most thickly settled portion, of the sluggish and filthy canal, became a nuisance and a breeder of disease. For years it was cursed by the people, condemned by the medical authorities, and anathematized by the press. That *twenty-seven* reports were required before the pest was abolished, is a sufficient commentary on the supineness of the local authorities.

In short, up to 1860, the Capital was in reality little better than an overgrown village. It had attained a population of nearly seventy thousand inhabitants, but the growth had been slow; Washington was repeatedly outstripped by cities which were not founded till long after it was well established. It had little wholesale business and literally no manufactures. When Congress was not in session, it collapsed like an empty

balloon. It was an extremely disagreeable place to visit, except for lobbyists, of whom it was the Paradise. The hotels were provincial in appearance and poorly kept. Great clouds of fine dust from the unpaved streets were in summer the torment of pedestrians, and the extent and quality of the mud in winter were proverbial with visitors. There were no regular grades throughout the city, and both the resident and the travelling public were at the mercy of equally poor and extortionate conveyances. Till 1862 there were no street railroads, even in the main thoroughfares. The sewerage of the entire city, high and low, was fearfully and conspicuously defective. There were no fine parks or drives, no public museums or theatres, of metropolitan size and convenience. In a word, the national capital was far inferior to many State capitals in beauty, size, reputation and the comforts of civilization. The people of the United States were tired of Washington, because it was apparently a dismal failure and beyond the prospect, if not beyond the hope, of redemption. It seemed destined, by some inscrutable decree of fate, to remain forever a hideous burlesque on the ambitious, but abortive dreams of its illustrious founders.

The change which overtook the hitherto unfortunate city, on the outbreak of the civil war, was as complete as it was unexpected. The drum and the trumpet, the sniff of gunpowder, and the tread of martial footsteps, were the signals which awoke it from lethargic slumbers. It was like Rip Van Winkle, pausing to stretch his feeble limbs and to rub his heavy eyes, as he gazed on scenes of universal activity and intense excitement. But there was a giant's work to do, or the nation would be lost. To prove worthy of a great opportunity, nay to perform a solemn duty, was now the gigantic problem before Washington. No longer was the Capital regarded with disfavor by the country at large. In an instant it riveted the attention of every patriotic citizen of the United States. Even the haughty nations of Europe looked on, not with indifference. For here the pillars of the

noble temple which had been erected to liberty and union, were apparently tottering. Here the greatest statesmen of the Republic were gathered together in solemn council, how to ward off the desperate stabs of a fraternal assassin. Here the splendid armies of the North—the bone and sinew of each loyal state—were officered and marshalled; hence they marched on campaigns which were destined to drench the plantations of the South with the richest blood in America, before the stars and stripes floated again over an undivided nation. Washington the sluggard, became, in the twinkling of an eye, Washington the warrior, whose neighborhood was a vast camp and whose very streets and houses seemed peopled with citizen-soldiery. With all this true patriotism, corruption and intrigue, recklessness and dissipation; waged unceasing and exciting conflict, in public and in private, in official circles and in life. Grave mistakes were made, but, in the main, the city served its purpose supremely well. People were no longer ashamed of it; they grew proud of it, for what it was and for what it was doing. For the first time it was really their Capital; they rejoiced at its progress and growth. And that growth was, indeed, marvelous. While from 1800 to 1860, the population had reached but 66,000, the increase of residents in the single decade between 1860 and 1870, was 56,000; during the war period the entire population averaged a quarter of a million of inhabitants; and the public expenditures, which in 1860 were $77,155,125 were in 1865, $1,906,433,331.

But on the return of peace, the subsidence of excitement, and the withdrawal of men and money, the city soon fell back into the same old ruts of indifference and sloth. It bade fair to fritter away all its new opportunities, by a culpable negligence of common enterprise and public spirit. But a taste of the new and fuller life served to make a few liberal citizens eager, at all hazards, not to allow its chance of still further development to be imperilled by any intervals of stagnation. Unfortunately for themselves, as well as for the city, their

zeal led them to the opposite and dangerous extreme; they dealt with other people's money. For this reason and in this way, during the last five years of its existence, the old Corporation ran up a debt of nearly three millions of dollars. This was done without authority of law and for work which was mostly ill-advised, fragmentary, not durable, and costly. Two millions and a half more were expended in this period on "ward-improvements." In addition to this enormous outlay, property-holders had to bear taxes for so-called "special improvements," aggregating another two millions and a half. So that the grand total for this short régime of "progress" was upwards of eight millions of dollars. This was so evidently the high road to bankruptcy, that a strong reaction against, not only individual officers of the city, but the whole system under which they existed, soon set in. No fact is truer, than that civilized men are apt to act with more energy where their purses than where their consciences are concerned. So long as the old Corporation was content to pursue a do-nothing policy, and avoided excessive debts, its clumsiness, weakness, and incompetency might be freely and even cheerfully acknowledged, no matter how visibly the city was seen to be suffering from inanition. But so soon as it committed the "unpardonable sin" (in the code municipal) of multiplying taxes so that they ground both rich and poor, its days were numbered; it was fated to fill a dishonored grave. The people turned a deaf ear to its ingenious excuses. The hiss of their indignation aroused even the dull senses of Congress. The chaos of existing affairs seemed to warrant a radical departure from previous attempts at reform. The result was that a brand-new government was struck off, like a coin from a die, by the combined talent of Congress working in consultation with local authorities. It came into being full-panoplied, like Minerva from the brain of Zeus; rejoicing in its strength, as a strong man about to run a race. By the people it was welcomed with cordiality, if not with fervor. The American has none of the *abandon* which makes the

Frenchman greet the reign of "Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité" with huzzahs of delight. But at last the clouds seemed to have rolled away; the central sun of its existence (Congress) shone more brightly than ever before on the pathway which led to success; men predicted *everything*, and really hoped for much, from the new District Government.

The opening scenes of this stirring drama, which may be entitled the Reign of the Board of Public Works, are laid in the year 1871. On the 21st of February, Congress abolished the old form of government and established the new. It consisted of a Governor, nominated by the President and confirmed by the Senate of the United States; a council of eleven members, acting in conjunction with the Delegates; and a House of Delegates, twenty-two in number, elected by the people of the District of Columbia, meeting annually at a specified date. A clause in the organic act forbade the creation of a debt by the legislative assembly, for improvements amounting to over five per cent. of the total assessed value of the real estate of the District.

Added to this corps of officers were an elected Delegate to Congress (with privileges corresponding to those of the Territorial Delegates); and Boards of Health and Public Works, placed in office by the President and Senate. The second board was really the pivot on which the new administration swung. It was composed of four persons, one of whom must be a civil engineer and elector of the city of Washington; one, a citizen of Georgetown; and one, a citizen of the District outside of these cities. The designated functions of the Board were, to take care of the streets; assess for improvements; and disburse certain appropriations made by Congress for the District. No authority was granted them to make contracts except under appropriations already voted; and all their important negotiations were to be filed in writing. Any contracts in which members of the board were found to be personally interested, either directly or indirectly, were to be declared null and void. Each year they were to submit a

detailed report of their transactions to the Governor and legislature of the District, for transmission to Congress. Their salaries were not extravagant; the men chosen being well indorsed; what little opposition there was to them came mostly from disappointed office-seekers. In a word, the experiment was a legitimate, though not a scientific one; hedged in with all reasonable safeguards against peculation or malfeasance in office; moreover, the plan was put on trial under the auspices of the dominant political party.

But before the Board of Public Works had done a stroke of work, they were involved in serious litigation, and every step of their subsequent career was bitterly and actively obstructed by a growing faction of their fellow-citizens. Nothing daunted, they persevered in their Herculean task; they even waxed in influence and strength, until their opinions and their deeds became the common property not of the Capital alone, but of the whole country.

When the old corporation expired, by limitation, on the 31st of May, 1871, comet-like, it left behind it a long train of debts and obligations. By the new government it was suspected as a thief and distrusted as an emeny. Suit was brought to restrain it from carrying on any more "improvements," or making contracts which would involve its successor. The Courts sustained the new government, on the ground that their rights began from the day of their appointment. Before entering on their own duties the Board of Public Works submitted a full and detailed plan of their proposed ways, means and ends, to the newly convened session of the Legislature. The question of grading and paving the streets and the system to be adopted in awarding the contracts received particular attention.

For many years the narrower streets in the city had been from seventy to one hundred and ten feet wide. Experience had proved that such an extreme width for all except the thoroughfares, was practically useless, while entailing a great and growing expense for keeping them in repair. The

Board, therefore, wisely recommended that only the principal avenues and streets should be retained at their present width, and that all the rest should be narrowed and "parked," according to the dimensions of the roadway, *i. e.*, the redeemed land turned into front grass plots, to be owned by the city, but cared for by the occupants of the houses. The money saved on the extra strip of road, would more than suffice to adorn the city with beautiful shade trees. This ingenious and inexpensive plan for adding at once to the economy and comfort of the city, had been recently inaugurated, but not fully perfected under the Mayor of the old corporation.

In awarding the contracts, the Board were to establish a scale of prices for which they thought the work ought to be done, a scale based on similar work performed in other cities. They were to let the contracts at these prices to "responsible" parties, under heavy bonds, thereby avoiding the danger of "straw bids." This plan was approved by President Grant; and in their subsequent trials the Board introduced evidence to show that only where it had been departed from and the contracts given to the lowest bidders had poor work and serious losses resulted. For *completing* their plans, the Board recommended the negotiation of a loan of four millions of dollars. The estimate was based on the prices already paid by the city for similar work, less a deduction of one-fifth. A saving was anticipated over the old prices because the Board would work with cash in hand, whereas the Corporation proceeded on a false and uncertain credit system, which the contractors charged for, roundly, in their accounts. The Governor of the Territory was to negotiate the loan, issuing registered coupons of fifty dollars, redeemable in coin, twenty years after date, and bearing interest semi-annually. These bonds were exempted from taxation in the Territory. The payment of interest and extinguishment of the debt were provided for by a tax not to exceed three per cent. of the assessed value of property in the two cities and the county, in proportion to

the improvements made in each. The sums thus appropriated, or any portion of them, were not to be applied to any other purpose.

Notwithstanding the magnitude of the proposed improvements, it was not expected that taxation would be increased, but rather reduced, owing to the stimulus which sound and comprehensive improvements would give real estate in all parts of the city.

"Jobbery and corruption" were especially exorcised in the first report of the Board; but, while they were still in embryo (*i. e.*, before they had begun their practical duties), charges were made that the Board were forming into a "Ring." Early in June they were obliged to stop work, not from the revelations of their critics, but from trouble with "strikers." That these men struck so soon and so obstinately for higher wages, is proof that the Board could not have been reckless in awarding their first contracts; for the successful bidders were also complaining that their expenses were heavier and their profits less, than under the old Corporation.

By the end of June the murmurs of discontent had swelled to some volume and the oppositionists ventured to hold a mass-meeting. It was a small affair, but it brought forth a large accusation, viz., that the clause of the organic law had been violated which limited the debt for improvements to five per cent. of the value of all the real estate in the District. The opposition was weakened by internal dissensions; some members were plainly "cranks"; others warranted the suspicion that they desired to serve their own ends rather than to promote the welfare of the public. Public attention had, however, been aroused and some impression had also been made on the assembly; for shortly afterward they cut down considerably the original estimates of the Board and placed new restrictions on their power. Payments for the work done under their direction were to be made by warrants on the treasury of the District and no warrant was to be drawn

unless the work done and accepted was at least ten per cent. in excess of the warrant.

But the muddy stream of opposition was still steadily rising and now flowed into legal channels. On the 24th of July (two days after Governor Cooke had successfully negotiated the four million loan at 97½ per cent., in New York) a Bill praying an injunction against the Board was filed in the Supreme Court of the District. The main ground was the creation of an excessive and unlawful debt. The answer was that the new government had been unjustly saddled with the debts of the old Corporation. If these were counted, the loan-bill was obviously contradictory to law.

The injunction was granted (August 4), the court holding that the new government was responsible for the debts of its predecessor, just as an heir might be bound by the debts of his estate. Pros and cons, legal subtleties and heated comments, on this puzzling question, were now bandied about from mouth to mouth, and did more to keep alive the smouldering embers of distrust against the Board, than the attempted "indignation meetings," which were, in reality, very tame affairs.

The assembly still stood by the Board, and a majority of the people, if they could be said to be interested in the subject at all, indorsed the position of the assembly. Half a million of dollars was voted to continue the most pressing improvements while the injunction lasted. Petitions poured in, on the unsightly and unhealthy condition of the city, owing to the recent disturbance of grades and drainage.

Nothing daunted by the bitter opposition to themselves and their plans, the Board perfected their plans for much work, in consultation with officers in the engineer corps, fixed the scale of prices for the paving contracts, and cleared the decks for action as soon as the legal obstacles should be removed.

The injunction was dissolved, the appeal coming up for argument on the 23d of October, and the constitutionality of the loan Act was sustained. The decision was, in effect, a

reversal of the decision of the inferior court; the ground being, that Congress had no right to shift debts from one debtor to another without their consent; the new government could not have either debtors or creditors, except in so far as they were created by itself; all the share or responsibility which its officers had in the affairs of the old Corporation was to see that they were wound up properly.

The loan bill was put to vote (November 22) and was ratified by the people by an overwhelming majority. Very naturally the workmen, who had been for months idle because of the injunction, the radicals who, having no property themselves, cared not a fig what became of the property of others, as also the full complement of schemers, grabbers, and "heelers," who always multiply like vermin whenever wholesale improvements are in progress in a city, all became the most enthusiastic supporters of the bill which committed the city to do the work with a rush.

Meantime, old enemies had not been idle. At the end of the year they were able to present to Congress a memorial with over six hundred signatures, giving formal reasons why the charges against the Board of Public Works should be thoroughly investigated. Not one in six of the petitioners was a property-holder. Their combined wealth represented less than four per cent. of the estimated wealth of the Territory. Nevertheless, their very grave request was granted. Something had obviously gone wrong with the new régime. The city was in a shocking condition. The winter had set in with unusual severity and the streets were in confusion and in places impassable. Demolition ruled and Restoration seemed banished for an indefinite period.

The Committee of Congress began their investigation in January, 1872. No expense was spared to make the examination thorough and conclusive. The oppositionists, few of whom were men of education and position, conducted their own case. Over two hundred witnesses were summoned to testify, many of whom were, or were supposed to be, experts

in the construction of improvements, in the leading cities of the country.

Early in the proceedings, it became manifest that the prosecution was feeling its way. Its indictment, though savage in general terms, failed in important particulars. Day by day the chief allegations crumbled to dust, when subjected to critical analysis. The prosecution failed to substantiate any one of the many counts, on which it had boasted that it would secure the conviction of the Board. Men who had sided with the prosecution at the outset, were presently convinced that the Board had been grossly maligned, or at least persecuted on hearsay evidence. The tide turned with a strong flow and on the crest of the wave was a counter petition from prominent citizens (some of whom had signed the original memorial) praying Congress to put an end immediately to incurring useless expense and ventilating unjust scandals. The Governor, in an open letter, contrasted the length of time (two months) occupied by the prosecution, with the prompt and specific denial (completed in nine days) of the Board. Then there was a chorus of angry contractors and anxious workmen, who complained that they were deprived of the work which had been assigned to them, for no other reason than that a few malcontents might air their spite at the public expense. Long before the conclusion of the trial, which ended in April, it was a foregone conclusion that the Board would be exonerated. For the time being, the principal actors in the farce were glad to slink out of sight of the public. The Board, therefore, remained as much of a mystery as ever, unimpeached in its practices, unshorn of its prerogatives, with the great bulk of its work still before it. It had received a moral victory, at the hands of the highest tribunal in the country. If honest, this could scarcely fail to have the effect of spurring its members on to additional efforts to prove the justice of the verdict, while if false, they had simply had pointed out to them just what rascalities it would be most necessary for them to conceal in the future.

The Board signalized their victory at once by the display of despotic powers. What stood in the way of their progress, was speedily made way with; the tracks of a dilatory railroad were torn up to grade a street; the canal was filled in without expenditure for any more red tape; the old market was abolished, against the remonstrances of many citizens. Not infrequently, citizens who had been absent from the city for a few days returned to find their houses perched on high embankments, without a word being said to them on the subject. A grim humor was added to the strange scene, when owners of houses, which had been rendered unsafe by this process, were summarily ordered to repair them, or they would be pulled down at their own expense. Very few residents ever got anything like adequate damages for the destruction of their property, however wholesale it had been. Prominent individuals might secure special Acts of relief, but the majority were lucky if they escaped excessive taxation for "improvements."

During the fall of 1872, the Board did their heaviest work. On what a scale they proceeded, may be judged from the fact that during the first *eighteen months* of their administration, twenty miles of side walk were laid, double that number of carriage pavement, six miles of tile sewer, seven miles of brick sewer, fourteen miles of water mains, twenty miles of gas mains, and twenty-eight miles of service pipes. Before the Board rested they laid thirty-five miles (afterwards increased to fifty miles) of more than a dozen different kinds of wood pavements, four miles of Belgian pavement, five miles of round block pavement, six miles of cobble stones, eight miles of MacAdam pavements, and nearly forty miles of graveled streets and roads, mostly in the country. They graded the streets within the city limits, made adequate and complete the sewerage system, and planted no less than twenty-five thousand shade trees, of many varieties, in different sections of the city. In short, they *created* Washington, as it is known to-day.

The effect of this vigorous policy was speedy in increasing the prosperity of the city; the bonds of the District came from twenty-five below, up to par, in one year; Congress increased their appropriations for the city to a figure which they had never approximated to before, (from $1,000 in 1870 to $4,000,000 in 1873). The local real estate transactions, which in 1870 were $4,000,000, in 1873 reached $12,000,000. Notwithstanding the severe panic of 1873, not a single business firm in Washington was obliged to suspend.

Taxes were ten per cent. less than under the old Corporation. No wonder that the masses were pleased with the energy of their representatives, and that, at the first election, the delegate in Congress, who was closely identified with the programme of the Board, was returned by an increased majority, notwithstanding a bitter opposition which had sprung up among (as the administration organs called them) "the same old gang" of injunctionists.

Just what was the cost of the transformation, is almost as difficult to determine accurately as the debt of the old Corporation. The original appropriation for the improvements was soon exhausted, and then the ingenuity of the friends of "progress" was taxed, to raise the means for completing the "comprehensive system" of improvements, which must be carried through under the supervision of the authors, or else serve as their damnation. It was a case of do or die with the Board, and they acted accordingly. Neither further injunctions nor the strictures of a hostile press deterred or terrified them. So long as they had the legal power in their hands, they ceased not to act with energy and effect.

They took some hints from the old Corporation, but these were much improved upon. One third of the cost of improvements was charged to the adjacent property. The taxes were at first low, but the next year the property was assessed at increased rates for "improvements," and the process was repeated, as often as was found necessary. The very amount of the assessments was alleged to be a proof

of the value of the improvements. A most ingenious scheme was devised in the form of a so-called "special sewer-tax," which netted $3,000,000. The city was divided, for this purpose, into five districts, the property in each being subjected to an arbitrary tax per square foot, without particular reference to value or location; if not promptly paid, certificates of lien on the property were issued. A "legal opinion" was obtained which supported the view that this was not a violation of the law limiting the amount of debt which could be created without consulting the people. When every other resource was exhausted, the Board issued "certificates of indebtedness," for $2,000,000, the plea being that their assets would still prove superior to their liabilities, if the delinquent tax payers could be made to pay and Congress would advance the funds which it owed the city. To the bitter end the Board maintained that they were not bankrupt, though there was not money enough left in the city treasury to pay the school teachers and the police. When the springs of local resources were pumped dry, the Board sought to negotiate a loan in New York, at a usurious rate. Believing that their sponsors, the United States government, could not desert them, the contractors were, of course, willing to continue their services, charging meanwhile an increased bonus in their contracts, as the credit of the District government gradually sank lower and lower. The Board at this time, having absorbed all the main functions of government, including control of the assembly, was supreme to a degree which has never been approached in any other American city. So great was the confusion of affairs, that the condition of its finances could only be vaguely guessed at. This accounts for the apparent apathy of the majority of the residents while being plunged into such an abyss of threatened ruin.

In this way the debt of the Territory was increased from $3,000,000 (in 1871) to $20,000,000 (in 1875) and of this astounding increase only the original loan of $4,000,000 was submitted to vote of the people, and this, at the time it was

voted on, was understood to include *all* the main improvements necessary for remodelling the city.

When the avenging storm broke, it came down in torrents. A second petition was forwarded to Congress praying that, in the interests of law and justice, the District government, and particularly the despots of it, the Board of Public Works, be examined at the bar of Senate and House, with a view to extinction, for mal-administration of public affairs and injuring the future prospects of the Territory. In form and substance, it was almost the exact counterpart of the former memorial; but times were changed; instead of being injured by others, the Board had injured themselves by their recklessness; the men who presented the new petition were not unknown jobbers, or hasty ignoramuses, but some of the wealthiest and most influential residents of the city, whose signatures commanded instant respect. The taxes for "special improvements" pressed heavily upon them. The legal authorities of the District decided that the taxes were legal. And so their only resource was to start a newspaper organ (it was called *The Patriot*) for exposing the Ring and to hire able counsel to appear before Congress in the arraignment of the local government. Not a few leading members of Congress had, meantime, become convinced of the dangers of the form of government then existing.

The investigation was promptly granted and an able committee was appointed to represent both the House and the Senate. The Board assumed a shrewd attitude, announcing that while perfectly innocent of the charges which had been made against them, they were entirely willing that the examination should be made as thorough and conclusive as possible. They even urged members of Congress to vote the funds needful for a complete trial. On all sides it was felt that the hour for the life and death struggle between the Titans and their adversaries had at last arrived. To facilitate the examination of the accounts on which the verdict hinged, a corps of thirty clerks was kept busily employed for a period of

some weeks, in reducing the memoranda to schedules convenient for reference. Ten thousand vouchers and over a thousand original contracts were brought to the Capitol and placed in the safe keeping of the committee, while the examination was in progress.

The whole trial is so replete with interesting and important facts, amusing incidents and weighty lessons, that one must despair of doing it full justice in scant space. Up to the very end it was a neck and neck race whether the Board would be triumphantly exonerated and retained (as almost the entire press of the city confidently predicted, to nearly the last day of the investigation); or their opponents would win a lasting meed of credit, for having deposed monsters of greed and unscrupulousness. As has so often proved the case in analogous circumstances, the truth was found to lie about mid-way between two extremes.

Some of the charges made against the Board were soon proved to be ridiculous, as, for instance, that they were sending repeaters to distant states to help in the election of Senators who were in league with the Ring; that its principal members were in the habit of holding consultations in other cities, in order that they might, with the greater thoroughness and secrecy, plot for the plundering of Washington; that members of the Board had been personally corrupted by bribes; that they had appropriated the school funds and that they had allowed contractors to use valuable machinery free of charge and even appropriate some materials without paying anything for them. On each and all of these counts, the prosecution was wholly lacking in conclusive, or even circumstantial evidence, and the introduction of such charges into their case, with the hope of exciting public opinion, was injudicious, if not unjust. The only excuse for it was, that the power and arbitrary methods of the Board made specific facts concerning them extremely difficult to get at, however firmly one might be convinced of their widespread guilt.

But, on the other hand, it was soon manifest, in the course of the trial, that a number of very startling, if not criminal

practices, could be brought home to the doors of the Board. Just how far the Board, as a whole, or its members individually, had exceeded their proper authorities, might never be proved, perhaps never was proved; but the fact that a vein of such wholesale irresponsibility, streaked all over with *suspicions* of collusion and fraud, was so soon struck, encouraged the prosecution to continue their efforts with unremitting zeal, in the hope of finding a still richer "lead." The coolness with which the prosecution abandoned one charge to take up another, gave occasion to the telling of an apt anecdote by Judge "Jere" Black, who appeared for the defense. A gentleman in western Pennsylvania, said he, once made application to a justice of the peace for a warrant to search for a turkey which he said had been stolen from him. The squire, looking over his book, could not find any form of a search-warrant for a turkey. He therefore concluded that it would be unlawful to issue one and so was obliged to refuse the gentleman his request. "But," added he politely, "I can give you a search-warrant for a pig, and while you are hunting for the pig may be you will find the turkey." For many weeks this was really the attitude of the prosecution; perhaps it was the only one possible in dealing with a strongly intrenched Ring, made so either for corrupt purposes, or because of factitious opposition. But it was a course which, for the time being, divided public opinion, caused all the muck heaps of loose scandal, personal spite and vague misstatement, to be raked over, diligently, until the casual observer got an impression of a far blacker state of affairs than really existed. The stench from these many loose "preliminary charges," which were of course eagerly caught up by the press, did much more to establish the disrepute of Washington, than any facts, beyond its immense debt, which were developed under sworn testimony. To regret that the New York papers did not find space or opportunity afterwards to retract those charges which were proved to be absolutely false and ridiculous, would be but to inveigh against one of the best-known failings of human nature.

However, the prosecution could and did prove many facts which were extremely damaging to the Board; some of their "special taxes" were shown to amount, practically, to confiscation; the profits of many contractors were excessive; certain contracts had been altered after they were signed, and the Board paid for the work at the new and increased rates; the original scheme did not contemplate paving the city with concrete, yet this radical change had been adopted without consulting the assembly. For each of these very serious inquiries, buttressed with substantial evidence, the defense had ready, however, an ingenious and often a satisfactory answer; the men who growled most about their taxes would not sell their property, when offered the same or higher figures than the Board had put upon it; some contractors went away with their pockets full, but others left Washington in disgust, declaring that there was no money to be made on the terms which the Board were offering to all of the contractors; no contracts had been amended except on the advice of the highest legal representative of the District, and then only for the purpose of facilitating work and really promoting the interests of the city, and not to help the contractors; the decision in favor of concrete was rendered by engineers of the United States government, while the assembly was not in session, and to wait for it to convene would only have caused the city an expensive and useless delay. The members of the Board were previously all men of good character, and not a single instance could be authenticated in which they had entered into corrupt negotiations, either with the assembly or any one of the contractors; if the assembly became pitiably subservient to them, because of their unprecedented power, they were, perhaps, more sinned against than sinning; while no bribes were accepted by them, it was not because there were no men at hand who made more or less direct efforts to bribe them; if no formal "pool" existed to buy up real estate in the sections of the city which the Board determined to improve, yet it was undoubtedly true that many of

their friends, somehow or other, knew, in advance, where the most extensive improvements would be made and hence were able to realize handsome speculations on little or no capital.

The most impressive fact which was developed concerning the Board, was its enormous and increasing power, a power which finally enabled them to make or mar the fortunes of whole sections of the city by a single stroke of the pen, which left the property of every individual wholly at their mercy, which had under its absolute control an army of hundreds and occasionally thousands of workmen; a power which, as the pressure of their work increased, was frequently exercised by individual members of the Board in sheer desperation, without consulting their colleagues, which had only to be used fraudulently, and millions upon millions of dollars might have been poured down the throats of the greedy sharks, in the form of the school of professional lobbyists, hired agents and "attorneys," dishonest contractors and schemers, who swarmed just *outside* the office of the Board of Public Works.

Paradoxical as the assertion seems, it is doubtful if Washington could have been transformed to its present condition under any other system, or at least by one which did not resemble this in many important features. The problem of re-creating the city was a gigantic, a wholly unprecedented one. The more it was studied into and brooded over, the more overwhelming were the difficulties in the way of its attainment sure to appear. Were the process attempted by the ordinary methods in use in other cities, the result would surely have proved a failure; there would have been divisions and delays, a loss of energy and enterprise, and very likely also a better chance for dishonest men to plan their rascalities at leisure. If men thought Washington could be reformed without immense sums being spent, often, though not dishonestly, without visible results, they were arguing in the face of the experience of other cities, many of which have run heavily into debt without realizing *any* comprehensive improvements whatsoever. Meantime the golden opportunity of making the Capital the

most attractive city on the continent, might never have returned.

What Washington needed more than anything else, what was worth more to it, at that time, than economy or system, or correctness of detail, was a master mind, to take its destiny firmly in hand and mould it to his individual will; to map out enough work to keep several generations busily at work, even if they did so unwillingly; to sweep away with a ruthless hand delays, obstructions, and the favoring of individuals at the expense of the public good; to plan the improvements on the most modern and liberal scale, and to *trust* that the city would grow up to them. Such a master mind was found in Alexander R. Shepherd, Vice-President of the Board of Public Works, and afterwards Governor of the District. Self-made, but not illiterate; a plumber by trade, but intimately acquainted with every inch of Washington from long residence and successful speculations in real estate; of indomitable perseverance, and more than ordinary executive ability; naturally a leader of men—this man brought many of the most rare and valuable qualifications of success to the office which he held as the real dictator of the District government. His hobby had been the development of the city; on its prosperity he had staked his entire property. Is it to be wondered at, then, that when the magnificent opportunity was unexpectedly granted him of putting his original theories to the practical test, he used them to the full? that carried away by the success of the first outlays, in drawing both capital and population to the city and also stimulating the home market, he thought the reforms could not be *too* comprehensive or *too* continuous?

But Shepherd was no mere spendthrift, who blundered unwittingly on the right course. Many of his plans showed a positive genius for municipal administration, rare in any country, and rarest of all in this country. His foresight in narrowing many of the ways which were showy, but useless and extravagant; his transformation of the sewerage system

from the worst to the best in the country; his insisting (notwithstanding vigorous adverse pressure) on giving the city even grades for the streets; and the adoption of concrete for the roads, instead of Belgian pavements, which were savagely championed by his opponents; all these measures have long been triumphantly vindicated from the severe criticism with which they were then assailed. Indeed, had the surface grades been retained, as the exasperated householders then so loudly demanded; and had the entire city been paved with Belgian blocks, on the recommendation of many experienced men, it is easy to see that the attractions of Washington, for a residence city, would have been much lessened and its growth thereby retarded, at a cost to itself of millions of dollars. So much must be said in justice to a man who was assailed for years with vindictive bitterness; who was driven from office in disgrace and virtually ostracised from the city which he had done more than any other one man, to make beautiful and prosperous; who got no credit for his successes and only curses for his failures, even when, as in the case of some roads, those failures arose more from legitimate experiments with new materials, than culpable negligence on his part; and who, though not a dishonest dollar was discovered to bear witness against him, is probably regarded by the majority of his countrymen as a second Tweed. Though selling out his interest in all paving companies before accepting a position on the Board of Public Works, Shepherd, on being taunted with the failure of a certain contractor to make an honest pavement, replied that he would like to have the case tried in Court to show that no man would have dared to approach him with a proposition to cheat the city. His was not, certainly, the attitude of a cormorant greedy to fatten at the public expense. So, too, was Baron Haussmann vilified while his improvements of Paris were in progress; and so, too, though in a less degree, Sir Christopher Wren was abused so long as he served in a public capacity.

The opportunity which Congress had failed to grasp was a really great and very rare one, of taking a grand step for-

ward in the science of government. The crying evil of all large cities is the injustice of the universal suffrage in reference to taxation; the havoc which ignorance and jealousy are apt to make in dealing with property which they have had no share in accumulating. How great the temptation is to rush recklessly into all sorts of extravagances, when other people will have to foot the bills, has already been seen in the case of Washington; parallel cases, where legislation has been expressly framed to benefit the many at the expense of the few, would not be wanting in the history of many other American cities.

Now Congress had only to say the word, and all this injustice would have been swept away at a single stroke; the chief obstacle to reform in other cities—inducing the masses, or the representatives of the masses, to consent to any abridgment of their privileges, however iniquitous they are known to be—would have had no weight here. For nothing could be clearer, from a study of the founding of the Capital, than that Congress had a perfect right to impose *any* form of government on the District which they might prefer, even though this should prove to be virtually a despotism.

But instead of creating a property qualification in the ballot and making all residents voters, a change for which there would have been sound precedent, both in ancient and in modern times, Congress was content to hide a false diagnosis of the case, under cover of a high sounding prescription. As if a new name would serve as a talisman to increase its resources, they called the District, a Territory. Without endowing the chief municipal officer with the powers which mayors in all our large cities are so much in need of to-day, Congress sought to atone for the omission by pretending that he was really a Governor; a Common Council was constituted a legislative assembly; ordinances were misnamed laws; the ability to remit petty fines, was misquoted as the "pardoning power." To be sure, many theoretical "checks" between the various functions of the local government were

alluded to, with almost as much confidence as they used to be by statesmen of the last century, as constituting a panacea against possible dangers. Thus the Governor could not appoint members of the Board of Public Works; the Board could not raise money except by vote of the assembly; a part of the assembly was appointed by the President, and a part was elected by the people. But all these pretty abstractions proved to be, in time of need, but ropes of sand; the local government, at its worst, was nothing more or less than a one-man power, with a divided rabble at his back. The rank absurdity of the whole system appeared, when it was realized that the Chief Justice of the United States was powerless, if he was a non-resident, to defend his property in the city of Washington by so much as his single vote against what he might believe to be the dishonest machinations of a Ring, while the laborer employed by the Board to dig in the sewer in front of his house, would claim his right of citizenship *and a ballot!* The city might plunge still further into bankruptcy, but the laborer would doubtless smoke his pipe with the utmost unconcern, so long as the contractor assured him his dollar and a half a day. This is Democracy, with a vengeance!

Congress had no other course open to it than to abolish the unfortunate District government, just as soon as it could, after the committee of investigation had closed their labors. Whether justly or unjustly, wisely or foolishly, the people of the District were pumped dry; they needed time to recuperate and to pick up courage to meet the further burdens and responsibilities which had been engrafted on them by the late form of government. Congress itself was puzzled again, as it had so often been before, to know what to do with its unruly child. So announcement was made that the new trial would be "provisional," which in 1878 was ratified as "permanent" unless afterwards amended.

The power is now lodged in the hands of a board of three Commissioners—two civilians, appointed by the President and

confirmed by the Senate of the United States, and an engineer officer, detailed from the army. All the numerous subordinates are appointed by the Commissioners. The engineer is allowed two assistants, also detailed from the engineer corps of the army, one of whom is in charge of the streets and the other of the sewers. Virtually the engineers control all money for street improvements, as they make out the estimates for the Commissioners, who forward them to the Secretary of the Treasury, for transmission to Congress and incorporation in the appropriation bills. Congress pays half the taxes. The salaries of all officers appointed by the President are paid by the United States; all others, by the District of Columbia.

In some respects this system is admirable, in others it is wofully and obviously defective. The minor functions of municipal life are discharged with a celerity unapproached in any other American city. If a nuisance is defacing the appearance or threatening the health of the city, or violation of the local ordinances is being committed by unscrupulous men, there need be and probably will be no useless delays of forms and ceremonies, to vex the spirit of justice; the victim will very likely be in the clutches of the law before he has time to know that he is in danger and, like the cuttle-fish, throw out his defenses. The appearance of the city is probably better cared for under the Commissioners, than it would be if opportunity were granted for factions and alliances to be mustered against the present regulations concerning the care of the streets and the erection of buildings, which, while they are stringent, undoubtedly conduce to the charm of the city. Then, under the Commissioners, the idea of making the progress of Washington *continuous* is never wholly lost sight of, whereas in other places periods of extraordinary vigor are often followed by long lapses of total idleness and quick decay. The funds of the District are safe, because managed by the Treasury Department of the United States.

But in other and more important particulars, the present system in vogue at Washington is radically and lamentably

defective; the Commissioners and engineers need not be residents, and hence may have but a languid interest in the prosperity of the city; higher salaries are paid to the officials than would probably be voted by the people; taxation for improvements (however well planned) which they have no share in directing must always remain galling to the pride of free-born American citizens, as, likewise, their inability to cast a vote for the President or any other officer of the United States; they have no voice in the election of even the local non-political officers, such as school trustees or constables; they are not allowed a voice in Congress, which is open to delegates from the Territory of Utah—alien in its defiance of the moral and legislative laws recognized by the Constitution. The District has not been granted an acre of school lands, while the other states and some of the territories have received them to the value of hundreds of thousands of dollars, yet it is compelled, by the compulsory education law (passed by Congress) and by the fact that a third of its population is colored, and that many government officials (including members of Congress) send their children to the public schools, to support a school system of almost unequalled costliness; this the District does while refraining from the taxation of certain real property of the general government, which it probably has power to tax, under the "Charter of Washington."

Ultra-conservatives may argue, "Let well enough alone"; nevertheless the present government of Washington is undemocratic, unfair, unscientific, and in need of a radical reform. Congress not merely spurns the District by its indifference, but frequently gives vent to the taunt that it cannot be bothered by serving as town council for such a small affair as the District of Columbia. On the *one* day in the month when its affairs are supposed to be considered, having been previously investigated by committees, the listlessness of the House and Senate is often painfully apparent, and public-spirited citizens having in hand a plan for helping the prosperity of the city, or a plea for obtaining

redress from injustice, will speedily be made to feel what a favor it is for them to appear in a national committee room, however disinterested their motives or incontrovertible their case may be. This naturally leads to the inquiry, whether the District is the debtor of Congress, or Congress is the debtor of the District, and what ought to be the future relations existing between the two.

The money side of the question is perfectly clear and convincing; it is eminently calculated to excite the indignation of generously-minded men. Congress has played the part of a parent uniformly neglectful, often sharp and cruel toward its offspring. It exhibits the case of a father who has reproached his boy for not living on a scale befitting his birth, though never once affording him the means to do so. By and by, led away by ambition, the boy runs heavily into debt. The plea of the boy is, "You ought to help me pay my debts, for (like the father of Charles James Fox) you made me a spendthrift by your own orders." The father's answer is, "I would like to help you, but there are too many other claims on my time and attention; to be sure, I put a great deal of money into my pocket by selling off your land when you were an infant, but then, in the eye of the law, I had a perfect right to do so."

In dollars and cents the account stands thus: from 1790 to 1876, Congress expended, in round numbers, five millions of dollars on the streets, avenues, and sewers of the city; during the same period the District expended twenty millions. This disparity, great as it seems, does not tell the whole story; the work of the District authorities has been general, while the general government has been in the habit of confining its improvements to the vicinity of its own buildings. In the matter of street lamps, except about government premises, Congress has been parsimonious in the extreme; where the city has supplied thousands, Congress has given hundreds; at times literally its only contribution has been a small allowance for the maintenance of the police. The government not

only owns all the streets in fee simple (it has been so decided by several Attorneys-General) and fully half of the real estate in the city, but it has made money by occasionally closing up streets and appropriating the land and by the filling in of the old canal, which cost the Board of Public Works $120,000 and netted the United States $2,500,000 worth of land.

In the gift of statues to adorn the various parks of the city, the government has been fairly generous; but, it must be remembered that these statues, which vary widely in merit as objects of art and are worth, at most, not more than a few hundred thousand dollars, were ordered, not so much for the adornment of the city, as to commemorate the great deeds of American heroes.

Had the government been preëminently successful in the management of its own local affairs, it would be an easier task to condone its remissness towards the District of Columbia. While having invested there more than fifty millions of dollars in public buildings, our government pays nearly a quarter of a million more for office rent in private buildings, which are neither fire-proof nor convenient. Some of the rents are enormous, larger than the interest on a sum sufficient to complete all the buildings needed in a satisfactory manner. Then there is ever present, under the very eyes of the Congressmen, the pitiable scandal of the Congressional library, the finest collection of books on this continent (and one of the finest in the world), ably managed by its accomplished librarian, yet poorly housed and awkward of access, in fact tumbling about the shelves, in many portions of the building, like rubbish in a junk-shop, and in danger of disintegration and irreparable damage by fire, if decent accommodations are not soon provided. So much for the false though so-called economy of our national administrators. At long intervals spasmodic efforts are made to complete local concerns in which the honor and the comfort of the government is at stake, instead of sinking the money in some impassable river or useless harbor; but in general, one is reminded of a phil-

anthropic society busily engaged in distributing tooth-picks to the cannibals, while having neither time, thought, nor money for the care of the needy and worthy in their own parish. But there appears to be little practical good in dwelling on these general features of the case, however sufficient they may seem to stir the sympathy of a national public; they have repeatedly been made the substance of able reports to both House and Senate, by members of distinguished abilities, who had become intimately acquainted with the unjust attitude assumed by Congress. General Grant was only one of several Presidents who have used, without avail, the influence of the Executive to rectify the existing abuses of good faith and the neglect of grand opportunity; he even sent special messages to Congress on this subject, to serve as a tonic against the constitutional apathy of that body towards questions having no direct bearing on party politics.

What Washington is, notwithstanding all these drawbacks, few need be reminded to-day. It is certainly the most spacious and in many respects the most attractive city of the new world; with a street-area more than double that of Paris; with sewers which rival the Cloaca Maxima of Rome; with an unusually fine water power; a superabundant supply of pure drinking water conveyed to it over a gigantic aqueduct which has been considered one of the marvels of modern mechanical genius; adorned at intervals with works of art which serve to inspire American patriotism and pride; with architecture which is unapproached in this country for grace and variety; with rapidly growing museums, scientific bureaus and schools of literature and art; the favorite and increasing centre for all sorts of conferences and re-unions, scientific, professional and social; the natural resting place for retired government officers, especially of the army and navy; the best workshop for literary men, in nearly all branches of their profession; relying for its growth upon neither commerce nor manufactures, but holding out the inducements, to persons of limited means, of an unsurpassed environment, a salubrious

climate, cheap and bountiful markets, fair rents and taxes, and a learned and cultured society. The increase of resident population in the last five years alone has been over twenty-five thousand. During the past fifteen years the growth of Washington has been more than the *entire population* of such old and prosperous cities as Portland, Maine, Charleston, South Carolina; New Haven, Connecticut; and Sacramento, California; representing, it will be observed, each section of the country. For the same period the growth of the Capital has been *five times larger* than *the entire population* of many cities, standing in the class next to those already mentioned.

What Washington might be made by the expenditure of a suitable sum of money, and a remodelling of its present administration, is easy to predict. The best planned and the most fairly governed city in the world, typifying our national patriotism, material prosperity and also testifying affirmatively on the mooted point as to whether we can exist gregariously without being bound over hand and foot to the destroying devil of Mercantilism; with the tarred streets extended to every section of the city, instead of being confined mainly, as now, to one section; with a driving and pleasure park of ample dimensions, for which there are beautiful sites within easy access of the city; with a handsome mall between the White House and the Capitol (according to the original plan); with a private mansion for the President, leaving the White House for public receptions and executive business; with some enduring building (whether it be in the form of a cathedral, or not) for the preservation of trophies, relics and memorials of national importance (here, again, carrying out the well considered plans of the founders of the Republic); with a new library for Congress, but still more for the people of the United States,—which should be, by far, the most commodious, for in time it will probably be the largest in the world,—these are only a few of the many practical problems concerning the future of Washington, which press for settlement. Action cannot long be delayed without rendering

these matters doubly hard of accomplishment, if not impossible. In some instances the temporary expenditure of the necessary capital would soon yield a sure and handsome return to the government, in addition to helping the city. Thus, able committees have several times demonstrated that by filling in the flats along the Potomac, between Georgetown and Washington, the government could recover about four hundred acres of land, which would be worth nearly ten millions of dollars, after deductions had been made for the streets. And besides the gain in money, the health of the city and the advantages for private commerce of bringing the building frontage out to a deepened channel would be largely promoted. The whole case is one depending much more on *disposition*, than lacking means or opportunity. The gross receipts of the government, instead of amounting, as at first, to a few thousands of dollars a day, are now counted in millions. Our surplus revenue to-day may be expected to aggregrate over one hundred and fifty millions of dollars a year. Under these conditions, the expenditure of a few millions of dollars in a decade, on the permanent improvement of the national Capital, becomes not some pretty, foolish dream, but a legitimate study for men endowed with the boasted practicality of the age. Examples to profit by are before us. France was not afraid to spend fifteen millions of dollars on a single avenue in Paris, and was rewarded by seeing the city grow in population, in consequence of the improvements, at the rate of *sixty thousand*, instead of *six thousand* per year.

What the future of Washington *will be*, is not so easy to predict. That it will continue to grow at a rapid rate for a number of years, is beyond doubt; it has been too well advertised recently and possesses too many advantages from the improvements already made not to be sure of this temporary prosperity. But it must not be supposed that its pathway is a perfectly straight and easy one. It is threatened with a debt of over twenty-one millions of dollars, which fact need not to be emphasized further than to remark, in passing,

that "it is double that of any other municipality in the country, if not in the world. The debt of New York, with all her wealth and commerce, is but four times as much. It is four and half times as much per capita as that of Virginia, which that great State with all her resources says she cannot and ought not to pay. Only three States have as large a debt." Slow progress is being made toward the extinguishment of this unparalleled indebtedness, even if the burdens of the city are in no degree increased. The amount which the United States appropriates annually for the District of Columbia is so nearly consumed by paying the interest and adding to the sinking fund, and by the current expenses of civil administration, that little or nothing is left for the extensive improvements, already mapped out, and which must soon be made, if George Bancroft's prediction is fulfilled and the city shall shelter over five hundred thousands of inhabitants before the next century has dawned. This may justly be considered by the government simply as providing for its own indebtedness and paying the salaries of its own officers, while meantime managing to escape all taxation on its real estate, which is equal already to half that in the city and is constantly increasing in value. The taxes ($1.50 per $100 on both real and personal property, assessed at the full value) are fair at present; but if Congress should, owing to increasing cost in administering the local government, or for any other reason, mistakenly exercise its prerogative of raising the rate, the result cannot but be disastrous to the prosperity of the city, in checking the influx of sensitive capital and discouraging the migration of numbers of families of limited means who, as well as the richer and fashionable class, are now turning to the national Capital as affording privileges which they cannot find elsewhere.

If Congress should assume the bonded indebtedness of the District and thenceforth devote a regular portion of its surplus revenue to improving the city in the manner best calculated to make it a model residence city, for all classes of

useful citizens, it would be doing no more than is equitable and wise; for the citizens themselves have expended more than the present debt on improvements, while meantime subject to extraordinary current expenses by the nature of the Capital, the presence and attitude of Congress. Washington could give the country the model of a city perfectly administered according to the most enlightened statesmanship which the nation at present affords. The example could not fail to be worth much financially to the country at large, without reckoning that each section of the country would be patriotic enough to welcome indirect taxation to an imperceptible additional amount for the completion of a magnificent Capital, owned by all, a Capital in whose lustre and advantages all would share equally.

Having devoted more space than was, perhaps, necessary to dwelling on the *possibilities* of Washington, it remains only to add that reforms in its management will come slowly if we rely upon vague good will or a general impression and careless admission that things are not what they ought to be at the fountain head of our great and growing government. What is needed is critical, unimpassioned study of the question, in all its branches, such as the best modern scholarship can supply; but, more than all, the future of Washington is waiting for personal and unflinching championship of its cause by some statesman or statesmen of unblemished reputation, of commanding influence and abilities. Staunch friends it has had, —Southard, Sumner, Grant, Thurman, Allison, Blackburn, and Morrill; but no one has thought worth while to make the development of the Capital one of the main and enduring issues of his public life. Without these conditions the existing inertia cannot be overcome; lacking this intrepid and tenacious leadership, timid members will fear that a new experiment in local government might prove still more costly and disastrous than the last; in short, the hour awaits the man, and until he comes, the Capital must remain partially under a cloud.

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